

We're starting a new series today (Title Slide) and we're looking at a sermon of Jesus in Matthew 23 where He says seven woes to the scribes and the Pharisees. Woe is an expression of grief. Job at some point says "Woe unto me." And Isaiah says, "Woe is me, I am a man of unclean lips." So Jesus is pronouncing judgement and saying, "If you continue to do these things... it will be bad for you. You'll be filled with deep sorrow." We don't always picture Jesus this way. Yet Jesus talked more about Hell than he did about Heaven, he wasn't afraid to address and point out sin and he had high expectations for those who wanted to follow Him. Perhaps that's one of the reasons that it's so important that we talk about it: So we can get a better idea of who Jesus is and what He wants from us. So each week we're going to touch on a different theme that we see in Jesus' sermon and today I want to talk to you about hypocrisy. Because it comes up a lot.

Hypocrisy is kind of this thing that we're all against right? but at the same time we might have a hard time defining or articulating it. We know we're against it though, right?

I was listening to a BBC radio podcast and one of the speakers said that the reason Trump won the election was because although people knew Trump was a liar, they felt like Clinton was a hypocrite and most people would rather have a lying politician than a hypocritical politician.

And whether or not you disagree with that particular speaker maybe one thing you're thinking is, "What's the difference?"

Have you guys ever seen or heard or read something like this: someone does something that's particularly cruel and someone else says or comments something like, "There's a special place in hell reserved for people like you."

Jesus actually says something really similar to "There's a special place in hell reserved for hypocrites."

Matthew 24:51 ⁵¹ He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

But hold on a second though okay. So I think one of the things that we learn from this passage of scripture and from Matthew 23 is that Jesus thinks that being a hypocrite is a really big deal. Right?

In Matthew 23 where Jesus gives the 7 woes he specifically calls the Pharisees and teachers of the law 'hypocrites' six of those times.

So let's take a test together really quick to make sure we're all on the same page.

True or false.

1. Everyone is a hypocrite

True or false. These things are hypocritical

2. Smoking cigarettes but telling your kids not to.
3. Letting people know only the best part of your lives on social media
4. Dressing up for Halloween
5. Espionage

6. Being “Minnesota Nice”
7. Using vulgar language but telling your kids not to
8. Wearing activewear but maintaining a sedentary lifestyle
9. Pretending to be another race in order to get into college

Who feels pretty confident about their answers?

Here’s the deal. There are different definitions for hypocrisy and we need to get at the heart of what Jesus means when He uses the word. Because that will effect whether or not some of our actions are to be considered hypocritical.

Hypocrisy, comes from a Greek word that used to describe an actor. Sort of, literally meaning, to put on a mask. Right? To take on another character, another personality, to pretend or to perform.

Politicians would eventually embrace the term, saying that those who had a public life needed to embrace hypocrisy. For the sake of others, it was their responsibility to play a certain role in public than they would in private.

Some modern secular scholars believe that it wasn’t until Christianity came about that hypocrisy began to take on a moral meaning. These secular scholars believe that it was the Christian desire for sincere faith that caused hypocrisy to take on a new meaning.

So, what does Jesus mean when he calls people “hypocrites?”

Here’s our definition:

“Pretending to be more morally superior than you really are in order to promote or maintain your personal image.”

If we apply these to the true or false list from earlier we begin to see that none of the things on that list fit this definition. Most aren’t pretending to be morally superior and most aren’t doing these things in order to promote or maintain their image.

One of my favorite verses on hypocrisy comes from the Old Testament. You won’t really see the word “hypocrisy” in the Old Testament because the jews didn’t really have a word for it. But the sin of hypocrisy is talked about all throughout it.

Ecclesiastes 7:21-22

- ²¹ Do not pay attention to every word people say,
or you may hear your servant cursing you—
²² for you know in your heart
that many times you yourself have cursed others.

Don’t you love that verse? It’s so real and so down to earth and so practical. Don’t pay close attention to what other people are saying about you. Eventually you will hear something bad and you know that you say bad things about others when you shouldn’t or when you don’t even mean it too. What’s he saying? He’s saying, don’t be a hypocrite. Don’t flare up. Don’t be mad. Don’t get bent out of shape. Love covers an offense.

Now here's the thing. In circles where moral "goodness" is and elevated and evaluated (you know, like a church)... there's going to be a strong bent towards hypocrisy and this is true of Jesus' time as well. You see, the Pharisees were very opposed to hypocrisy and not only did they teach against it but they caricatured other Pharisees for their hypocrisy. Being anti-hypocrisy wasn't unique to Jesus.

The Talmud lists 7 types of Pharisees. One of them Kory mentioned a few sermons ago.

- 1.) The Shoulder Pharisee (shikmi)
 - Carries his good works on his shoulder (to be seen)
- 2.) The "Wait a little" Pharisee
 - Finds excuses for putting off good deeds
- 3.) The Bleeding Pharisee
 - "One who makes his blood to flow against walls."
 - (to show others what lengths he goes to to avoid looking at women)
- 4.) The Pestle Pharisee
 - (his head is bowed like a pestle in a mortar)
 - Publicizes his humility and holiness
- 5.) The Reckoning Pharisee
 - Performs good deeds and then a bad deed (or vice versa) because they cancel each other out
 - (Maybe the calculating Pharisee).
- 6.) The Pharisee of fear
 - Obeys God out of fear of punishment
- 7.) The Pharisee of love
 - Obeys the Lord because they love him with all of their heart.

Notice for the Jews... it was easy to be a bad Pharisee (there were 6 kinds of bad Pharisees) and hard to be a good Pharisee (there was only one kind).

Here's what I want us to look at this morning.

- 1.) **3 factors that drive hypocrisy**
- 2.) **3 areas of life that hypocrisy kills**
- 3.) **3 options**

The first factor that drives hypocrisy is self-exaltation (Matthew 6:2,5,&16)

Jesus says that the hypocrites give to the poor in order to be honored by men.

He says that they pray in public so that they may be seen by men.

And finally he says that they neglect their appearance while they fast in order to be noticed by men.

We see that self-preservation drives hypocrisy in Luke 6:42

Jesus says, in order to address someone else's sin. We have to address our own first. Listen guys. Often we think this is counterintuitive. Often we think we have to be placed on a pedestal in order for people to take counsel from us. Don't we? We think, "Oh I can't let my kids see my past. Then why would they listen to me?" If you're a small group leader or a mentor or a pastor or a youth leader or a boss... we make this excuse of, "Oh I can't expose myself, I can't confess my sin, I can't apologize, I can't accept

blame, I can't let other people know that I'm not perfect because then I'll lose my right to lead and guide them."

But what does Jesus say? You have to address your sin in order to effectively help someone out with theirs. Anything else is hypocritical. We have this desire for self-preservation that says, you know I've exalted myself. I've built this reputation for being good and holy and spiritually mature and so I need to maintain it because this is what people have come to expect of me and even for their sakes I need to be the person they want me to be.

And finally we see that inauthentic community drives hypocrisy. Pastor Kory shared last week about the importance of creating a life-giving culture and one of the things that meant was that we have authentic community. We need to love and like each other and that means knowing each other's mud and embracing each other anyway just like we would do with any other family member that we loved.

But inauthentic community will drive hypocrisy. Inauthentic community is a place of unfair judgment, it's a place where people are afraid to be vulnerable and transparent because everyone else is encouraged to act and pretend and fake it in order to be accepted.

Sometimes this happens from lack of community. When we don't spend time sharing life, when we don't spend time getting to know one another, we can sometimes have unrealistic expectations for one another.

Look at Luke 12:1 with me.

Meanwhile, when a crowd of many thousands had gathered, so that they were trampling on one another, Jesus began to speak first to his disciples, saying: "Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.

I love that Jesus sees a crowd of many thousands gathering. What's his reaction? He turns to his disciples and he says, "don't ever be hypocrites." Don't ever pretend to be better than you really are in order to keep up appearances. Even if many thousands come to hear from you. Even if the spotlight is on you. Be on your guard against infectious hypocrisy.

There are three areas of life that hypocrisy kills

1. Our Community

First of all, hypocrisy kills our community. If I'm hypocritical then my community does not know me and if my community does not know me then they don't know how to help me or even how to relate to me. We also begin to start placing unnecessary expectations on ourselves and on others.

We see this clearly in Galatians 2:11-14

Peter, one of the apostles and leader of the early church begins to live according to Jewish dietary laws and customs even though He knew that Christ had freed him from Old Testament law. When Paul sees it, He rebukes Peter to his face. But even more so, Paul includes it to this letter to the Galatians. It's such an important issue for Paul that He's willing to tell the Church about it and expose his friend and fellow apostle. Here's what he says

11 When Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. 12 For before certain men came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group. 13 The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray.

14 When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas in front of them all, "You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs?"

If we want to cultivate the kind of life-giving culture that Pastor Kory preaches about last week – if we want to have authentic community, if we want to have radical hospitality and unrivaled compassion then we can't allow hypocrisy to live amongst us. Hypocrisy will absolutely kill life-giving community.

In **1 Peter 2:1** Peter has just gotten done telling his readers to love one another deeply from the heart and then he creates this list of community killers and this is what he says, "2 Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind."

2. Our growth

Have you ever lived a double life? If you have secret, ongoing sin, then you live a double life. It can be really hard to know who you are when your community doesn't know who you are. Your sense of self, your ability to know and understand and accurately describe who you are becomes undermined. If you act differently than what your community has come to expect of you, it can be really confusing. It's one of the reasons that theologian William Temple said, "**Your religion is what you do with your solitude.**" I've mentioned that before. What you do when no one is looking – that reflects your beliefs. I've had secret sins in my life before. As a result, I've lived what felt like a double life. I've struggled to know which version of me was the real me. It's not fun. It is bondage.

Hypocrites don't take the plank out of their own eye. They leave their own sin unaddressed. They don't grow. They think they can worship God by offering sacrifices even if the rest of their lives is full of sin and idolatry.

In Mark 7:6 Jesus says, "**Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written:**

"These people honor me with their lips,
but their hearts are far from me."

3. Finally hypocrisy kills our witness

There's a passage in the Talmud where it lists the three type of people who are hated by God. (Talmud Pesachim 113b) The first is he who speaks hypocritically. Or literally "He who says one statement with his mouth but says another in his heart." Interestingly, the other two people that God hates, according to the Talmud, are people who are bad witnesses. So you have this list of three people. The first is a false witness to himself. The other two are types of bad witnesses to other people. All three types of people are people who can't be trusted.

We all know this to be true and people love to use it as a reason for why they don't go to church or don't even see Christianity as an option. Why? They've seen too many people who claim to be Christian yet don't look anything like Jesus. I had a neighbor at my last church who said, "I have a lot of friends who are Christians but they do all the same things that I do and they aren't living any differently so I guess I just never felt a need to go to church." In 2 Corinthians 5:20 Paul says that we are Christ's ambassadors. We're Christ's representatives. Whether we like it or not, Jesus has chosen the Church to be His Body and so it's the Body of Christ that the church portrays. It's why Jesus says, "love one another as I have loved you, by this the world will know that you are my disciples." Jesus' disciples are supposed to look and love like Jesus.

I need to stress one thing as we end here. Go back to our original definition for hypocrisy. Hypocrisy isn't "telling different things to different people."

Hypocrisy is

"Pretending to be more morally superior than you really are in order to promote or maintain your personal image."

The key is to check your motivation. Are you withholding information in order to appear to be more morally superior than you really are? Are you doing it to promote or maintain your personal image? There are going to be times when someone has shown you that they can't be trusted. There are going to be certain people who get to know more about you than others. That's not hypocrisy. I am not saying, "tell everyone everything." I am saying, "give an accurate and fair representation of who you are and find people who can know you fully."

And if at any time there is something that makes you go, "what about my reputation?" Then I just want you to take a moment and say, "Is this hypocrisy?"

So here are our three options.

- 1.) Claim to be Christians and continue in our private sins.
- 2.) Claim to be Christians and be very public about our sins. (I find this to be just as hypocritical as the first option)

If you choose either of those two options you will kill our community, you will kill your growth, and you will kill your witness.

- 3.) We can live out our faith obediently and confess our sins to God and to each other when we do not.

I want to end in an unusual way this morning. I want to meditate on a chunk of scripture together. And I want to prayerfully ask God to speak to us as we do.

1 John 1:6-2:5

⁶If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. ⁷But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.

⁸ If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. ⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰ If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us.

2 My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. ² He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.

³ We know that we have come to know him if we keep his commands. ⁴ Whoever says, “I know him,” but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in that person. ⁵ But if anyone obeys his word, love for God is truly made complete in them. This is how we know we are in him: ⁶ Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did.

Will you repeat with me in confessing our sins to God this morning?

Most merciful God, we confess that we have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done, and by what we have left undone. We have not loved you with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. We are truly sorry and we humbly repent. For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ, have mercy on us and forgive us; that we may delight in your will, and walk in your ways, to the glory of your Name. Amen.